Remaining Faithful in Galus

An Erev Shabbos drash for Parshas Vayeitze

Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz

Based on Rabbi Meir Tzimrot, "כח השפעת הסביבה," in Na'eh Doresh, Parshas Vayeitze, pp. קיא–קטז.

How can we live among negative influences and remain ourselves

How does a Jew survive spiritually in golus? How do we live in a world whose attitudes and values can be so different from the Torah's, without gradually absorbing those attitudes ourselves?

We may know perfectly well that something is wrong. We may have been brought up differently. We may sincerely intend to remain faithful to everything we believe. But what happens when we hear the same attitudes every day, see the same behaviour everywhere, and find ourselves surrounded by people who regard it all as perfectly normal?

Will knowing what is right be enough? Will our upbringing protect us? Does age or experience make us immune? And if the influence of our surroundings is so powerful, what can we actually do to withstand it?

Yaakov Avinu gives this question a very concrete setting. At the end of his years with Lavan, he says:

> זה לי עשרים שנה בביתך
>
> "*These twenty years I have been in your house.*"

Twenty years in Lavan's house. Twenty years of living and working in close proximity to a man whose conduct was the opposite of everything Yaakov stood for. How does a person spend twenty years in that environment and emerge still faithful to the Torah? How does he remain Yaakov?

That question is particularly striking because the Torah does not treat the influence of a bad environment lightly. It goes out of its way to praise someone who resists it. Yet we also find people who live among tzaddikim and remain wicked. Evidently, our surroundings have tremendous power, but we still have a responsibility to decide how we will respond to them.

Let us work through four parts of the answer: take the danger seriously and guard our exposure; find people who strengthen us; keep our sensitivity to wrongdoing alive; and acquire the Torah knowledge and inner strength that enable us to judge our surroundings properly.

Source: Bereishis 31:41.

1 Take the influence of your surroundings seriously

Even years of achievement do not provide a guarantee

Our first protection begins with an honest admission: I can be influenced. My good intentions and previous achievements do not give me permission to become careless about my surroundings.

Chazal teach that Hashem ordinarily does not attach His Name to a tzaddik during that person's lifetime. As long as a person is alive, the possibility remains that the yetzer hara could lead him astray. A life of righteousness is not something we can regard as finally completed while we are still living it.

The Gemara in Berachos gives a sobering example:

> אל תאמין בעצמך עד יום מותך
>
> *"Do not trust yourself until the day of your death."*

Yochanan Kohen Gadol served in the kehunah gedolah for eighty years, and in the end he became a Tzeduki. Think about what that means: eighty years of service as Kohen Gadol, yet those years did not remove his need to remain watchful.

The drash identifies Yitzchak Avinu as the unique exception. When Hashem appears to Yaakov, He says:

> אני ה׳ אלקי אברהם אביך ואלקי יצחק
>
> *"I am Hashem, the G-d of Avraham your father, and the G-d of Yitzchak."*

Yitzchak was still alive. Why, then, did Hashem attach His Name to him?

Rashi explains that although we do not generally find Hashem attaching His Name to living tzaddikim, here Yitzchak's circumstances were different. Rashi invokes the pasuk in Iyov, "He does not place His trust even in His holy ones," and then explains that Yitzchak's eyes had grown dim, he was confined to his home, he was regarded as though dead, and the yetzer hara had ceased from him.

One detail in that explanation deserves particular attention: **"וכלוא בבית" — "He was confined to his home."**

Why is that detail necessary? It was not enough to say that Yitzchak was elderly. It was not enough to add that he could no longer see. The explanation also includes the fact that he was no longer going out into the surrounding environment.

These words can be understood as a remarkable warning about the power of the street. The inference drawn in the source essay is that had Yitzchak not been confined to his home, but continued to go out into the street, its atmosphere could have influenced him for the worse, even at his advanced age and despite his blindness. Even after mentioning Yitzchak's advanced age and blindness, the fact that he was removed from outside influences still matters. We are speaking about Yitzchak Avinu, yet the conditions of his environment are part of the explanation.

If that is so, how can any of us casually say, “It makes no difference where I spend my time, what I listen to, or what company I keep. I am already the person I am”?

We have to take responsibility for what we allow to surround us. Where we can avoid an influence that weakens our avodas Hashem, we should appreciate the value of doing so.

Sources: Berachos 29a; Bereishis 28:13 and Rashi there; Iyov 15:15. The emphasis on the danger of the surrounding street is the source essay’s explanation of Rashi.

An influence can remain long after we leave it

There is another passage that shows how deep the effect of an environment can be.

The Torah says of the wives whom Esav married:

> ותהיין מרת רוח ליצחק ולרבקה
>
> *“They were a source of bitterness of spirit to Yitzchak and Rivkah.”*

Rashi explains the cause of that bitterness: these women practised avodah zarah.

Chazal ask why Yitzchak is mentioned before Rivkah. The Midrash explains that Yitzchak’s distress was greater. He had never been accustomed to avodah zarah, whereas Rivkah had grown up with a father and a brother who worshipped idols. The sight was therefore less unfamiliar to her.

Both were distressed. Both rejected what these women were doing. The difference was in the intensity of their reaction. An earlier familiarity had left a trace.

Now consider the chronology used in this explanation. Rivkah had left her father’s home at the age of three. Esav married when he was forty, by which time Rivkah was sixty-three. **Sixty years had passed since she left that house.**

Yet the influence of the surroundings she had known so long before still left an impression on her response. Her pain at the avodah zarah was less than Yitzchak’s.

That is a very subtle form of influence. A person can remain a tzaddekes, reject the wrongdoing, and still have her sensitivity affected by what she has become familiar with. We must therefore pay attention to what shapes our reactions, as well as to what shapes our actual behaviour.

Sources: Bereishis 26:34–35 and Rashi to 26:35; Bereishis Rabbah 65:4. The ages follow the chronology used in the original drash, based on Rashi to Bereishis 25:20.

The innkeeper who expected a change overnight

A story is told about Rav Elchonon Wasserman, zt”l, who came to the United States to raise money for his yeshivah.

Toward evening, he arrived at an inn. He asked that he not be served a dairy meal, explaining that he was careful not to consume chalav akum. At supper, the innkeeper respected his request and served a meal that contained none.

The next morning, however, Rav Elchonon came to breakfast and was surprised to find that he had been served cheese.

He turned to the innkeeper. “Did I not make a point of telling you that I am careful not to consume chalav akum?”

The innkeeper answered, “But you have now spent a night in the United States!”

He explained: “Rebbi, I have been hosting distinguished people in my inn for decades. Many of them tell me in the evening that they are careful about chalav akum. Yet not one of them has maintained that standard after spending a night in the atmosphere of America.”

That was the innkeeper’s reported experience and expectation. Rav Elchonon’s objection makes clear that he had not abandoned his standard. But the innkeeper had become accustomed to seeing people arrive with a commitment and then adjust it to the atmosphere around them.

The story asks us to notice how a change of environment can begin to change a person’s expectations of himself. Something that mattered yesterday can start to feel inconvenient, unusual, or unnecessary today simply because the people around him take a different approach.

Our first response must therefore be humility about our own vulnerability. We need to be careful about the influences we take in, because even sincere commitments require protection.

Source: the story as related in Na’eh Doresh, pp. קיב–קיג.

2 Find people who will strengthen you

Once we recognize the power of an environment, we can understand why good companionship matters so much. A person surrounded by contrary voices needs someone who helps him hold on to what he knows is true.

The student who stopped trusting his own eyes

There is an illustrative story about a scientist who wanted to demonstrate the influence of society on an individual.

He called ten of his students into his room. Nine of them were told beforehand what he was doing. The tenth knew nothing about the plan; he would be the subject of the experiment.

The scientist drew two lines on a board. The line on the left was clearly and significantly longer than the line on the right.

He turned to the first student, a young man who received a hundred on every examination, and asked, “Which line do you think is longer?”

The student appeared to consider the question carefully. Then he answered, “I have come to the conclusion that the line on the right is longer.”

The scientist turned to a second student, another diligent and talented member of the class, and asked for his opinion.

This student also appeared to think deeply. “At first I had some doubts,” he answered, “but after considering it, I have reached a clear and definite conclusion. The line on the right is longer.”

The same thing happened with the remaining students who had been told the plan. All nine gave the same answer: the line on the right was longer.

Finally, the scientist turned to the tenth student.

“Which line do you think is longer?”

The young man was visibly struggling. In his mind, the argument went something like this:

“What is happening here? I can clearly see that the line on the left is longer. But nine students have already answered. These are the talented, successful students in the class, and every one of them says that the line on the right is longer. Can they all be wrong, with me the only clever person in the room?

“Perhaps my vision is blurred. I haven’t eaten today. I haven’t had any coffee either. I feel dizzy. My eyes must be playing tricks on me.”

Several minutes passed. The scientist pressed him to give his answer and say what he thought.

Finally, the young man said, “The line on the right is longer.”

He could see the correct answer. Yet he did not have the strength to stand against all nine people around him. Their certainty made him distrust his own perception.

That is the pressure the story illustrates. A person may begin with a clear understanding and then slowly wonder whether he has any right to hold it when everyone around him insists otherwise. Intelligence by itself does not make that pressure disappear.

Source: the illustrative account in Na’eh Doresh, pp. קיד–קטו.

Why Rivkah receives a particular praise

Now we can appreciate a question about our Imahos.

The Torah repeatedly draws attention to Rivkah’s background. It describes her as the daughter of Besuel, from Padan Aram, and the sister of Lavan. Rashi explains the point of these details:

> להגיד שבחה שהיתה בת רשע, ואחות רשע, ומקומה אנשי רשע, ולא למדה ממעשיהם
>
> *“To tell her praise: she was the daughter of a wicked man, the sister of a wicked man, and the people of her place were wicked; nevertheless, she did not learn from their deeds.”*

There were pressures from every direction: her father, her brother, and the people of the place where she lived. Her remaining righteous in that setting was an extraordinary achievement.

But why does the Torah single out Rivkah in this way? What about Rachel and Leah? They, too, were daughters of a wicked man. They, too, lived in a place filled with wickedness. They, too, refused to learn from the evil around them. Why is this particular praise emphasized about Rivkah?

The answer offered here is that Rivkah was alone. She had no one alongside her to strengthen her against all the wickedness surrounding her.

Rachel and Leah had each other. Rachel could strengthen and encourage Leah, and Leah could strengthen Rachel. Each sister could help the other remain faithful to what was right.

Their surroundings were still dangerous, and their righteousness still required effort. But they had something Rivkah did not have: another person who understood what they were trying to preserve and helped them preserve it.

Think of the difference that makes to the student facing nine unanimous voices. Now imagine having someone beside you who says, "You are seeing clearly. Hold on to what you know." The presence of one supportive person can change how alone you feel in the struggle.

For us, that gives real importance to a spouse, a friend, a chavrusa, or a community that encourages avodas Hashem. We should take care to have people in our lives who help us maintain our standards. And we should recognize that we can provide that same strength to someone else.

Rachel could encourage Leah, and Leah could encourage Rachel. The support went in both directions. We can help one another withstand pressures that would be much harder to face alone.

Sources: Rashi to Bereishis 25:20; the comparison between Rivkah and Rachel and Leah is the source essay's explanation, Na'eh Doresh, p. קיא.

3 Keep your sensitivity to wrongdoing alive

Good companionship gives us support. We also have to watch what happens within us over time. Even while we still know that something is wrong, repeated familiarity can dull our response to it.

Leah Imeinu teaches us how deliberately a person may need to work to prevent that from happening.

Why did Leah keep asking

The Torah tells us:

> ועיני לאה רכות
>
> *"Leah's eyes were tender."*

The Gemara in Bava Basra asks how we should understand this description. If it simply means that her eyes were physically weak, would the Torah be speaking disparagingly about a tzaddekes?

Rav explains that the words are a praise of Leah.

She would hear people at the crossroads saying, "Rivkah has two sons, and Lavan has two daughters. The older daughter is for the older son, and the younger daughter is for the younger son."

That meant that people assumed Leah would marry Esav, while Rachel would marry Yaakov.

Leah would sit at the crossroads and inquire about them.

“What are the deeds of the older son?”

“He is an evil man. He robs people.”

“And what are the deeds of the younger son?”

“He is an ish tam, a wholesome man, who dwells in the tents of learning.”

Leah would cry until her eyelashes fell out. Her tender eyes testified to her distress at the prospect of being joined to Esav. What might have seemed a physical shortcoming was actually evidence of her spiritual greatness.

But this raises another question. Why did she continue going back? Once she had established what Esav was like, what was there left to investigate?

Sources: Bereishis 29:17; Bava Basra 123a.

The shidduch that needs no further investigation

Imagine that a Jewish father comes to a yeshivah to inquire about a charming young man who has been suggested as a shidduch for his daughter.

He begins asking questions, and someone tells him, “He certainly has an excellent mind. The difficulty is that he has several police files against him.”

The father decides to speak to the mashgiach.

The mashgiach says, “He is a very talented young man, with a good head on his shoulders. He also has golden hands. The trouble is that there have been complaints from the other bachurim, and from the nearby grocery stores, that he uses those hands to steal. There isn’t a lock that can withstand his golden hands.”

Would the father continue investigating this shidduch? Would he return the following day to collect a few more details? Surely he would get away from that suggestion as quickly as possible.

Why, then, did Leah need to go out to the crossroads day after day to hear about the man everyone assumed she would marry?

If the first day’s report told her that he was a robber, was that not enough? If the second day’s report told her that he was a murderer, did she need a third report? And after hearing about the five transgressions he committed in a single day, why would she still need to go back and hear more about his wickedness?

She already knew that he was a rasha. Why keep listening?

Knowing the facts and continuing to feel their meaning

The explanation is that Leah understood the society in which she lived. She knew how corrupt and destructive its standards were. She was afraid of what could happen to her own reaction while she remained within that environment.

At first, the reports about Esav horrified her. But what if that horror began to fade? What if she became accustomed to what she had heard? What if she gradually found herself willing to accept the very thing she had originally rejected?

She could begin to tell herself, “True, I heard certain things about him. But I will educate him. I will bring him back in teshuvah. Everything will be all right.”

Those thoughts might sound hopeful. In Leah’s situation, however, they could become the explanations by which she allowed herself to accommodate Esav’s crimes and corruption. Her surroundings could make his conduct seem tolerable, until she agreed to the marriage.

Leah therefore went back day after day. She needed her understanding of Esav’s wickedness to remain vivid enough to withstand the atmosphere around her.

The drash borrows Chazal’s expression that no two prophets prophesy in precisely the same style. Different people communicate differently. Each day Leah heard from another person, in another style, with different words and different expressions.

Those fresh descriptions stirred a renewed emotional response. What she already knew became vivid to her again. She did not allow the surrounding society to make Esav’s behaviour feel acceptable through familiarity.

That explains the purpose of the repeated inquiries. The facts had been established, but her ability to continue responding to those facts properly still needed strengthening.

We can understand the danger. A person sees or hears something wrong and is initially disturbed. After a while, he encounters it so often that he scarcely reacts. Eventually he may begin supplying reasons why it should not disturb him at all.

Leah took that possibility seriously. She worked to preserve the sensitivity with which she had first recognized the evil. Her repeated tears were part of her refusal to let the values of her surroundings become her own.

This gives us a third part of our answer. We need to keep returning to what clarifies right and wrong for us, so that familiarity does not gradually erase the difference. The conviction we had yesterday may need renewed attention today.

Source: the explanation of Leah’s repeated inquiries in Na’eh Doresh, pp. קיא–קיב.

4 Build the strength and clarity that come from Torah

We can now return to Yaakov. Taking precautions, receiving encouragement, and preserving our sensitivity are all essential. But how did Yaakov acquire the strength to live with Lavan for twenty years?

Yaakov prepared before entering Lavan's house

Before going to Lavan, Yaakov withdrew for fourteen years into the yeshivah of Shem and Ever and immersed himself in Torah learning.

The explanation offered here is that Yaakov was deeply concerned about the danger of being influenced by Lavan. His preparation was therefore deliberate. He first strengthened himself through Torah, before entering the environment he would have to withstand.

The expression used is **"תורה תבלין" — Torah as the remedy against the yetzer hara.** Learning gives a person spiritual strength, and it also develops his ability to recognize what is true. He becomes better equipped to distinguish the Torah's values from the values being pressed upon him.

Only when Yaakov felt that he had filled himself with that Torah strength, and could be in Lavan's company without being drawn into his ways, did he go.

That preparation answers a weakness exposed by the story of the ten students. The tenth student saw the truth, yet lost the confidence to stand by it when everyone else disagreed. Yaakov's learning gave him both a clear understanding of the path he should follow and the inner strength to continue following it.

Sources: Rashi to Bereishis 28:9 and 28:11 for the fourteen years of learning; the explanation of their role in preparing Yaakov for Lavan in Na'eh Doresh, p. קטו.

Whose behaviour becomes your example

The drash brings a Chassidic explanation of Yaakov's words:

עם לבן גרתי

"I lived with Lavan."

Rashi explains that "גרתי" has the numerical value of 613, תרי"ג. Yaakov was saying that he had lived with Lavan and nevertheless kept the 613 mitzvos, without learning from Lavan's evil deeds.

How did he manage that?

The Chassidic saying reads the next words as an answer:

ויהי לי שור וחמור

"I had an ox and a donkey."

In this homiletical reading, Yaakov is saying: I regarded Lavan's conduct as I would regard the behaviour of an ox or a donkey.

Consider a person who works in a cowshed. He spends the day among animals that walk on four legs. Does he come home thinking, "Everyone around me walks on four legs. Perhaps I should begin walking on all fours as well"?

He understands that their behaviour is not his model for how a human being should live.

After strengthening himself in the tents of Torah, Yaakov knew the path of truth. He could live and work near Lavan without treating Lavan's behaviour as a standard he ought to imitate. He understood that there was nothing for him to learn from Lavan's wicked conduct.

This Chassidic interpretation makes a precise point. Proximity does not have to give someone authority over our values. Yaakov's daily dealings with Lavan did not mean that Lavan was qualified to teach him how to live. Torah had already given him the understanding by which to judge what he encountered.

Sources: Bereishis 32:5–6 and Rashi to 32:5; the ox and donkey interpretation is the Chassidic saying quoted in Na'eh Doresh, p. קטו.

Ovadiah shows that resistance is possible

We should not hear all these warnings about our environment and conclude that a person is helpless. Chazal give us a striking comparison that preserves both the seriousness of the danger and our responsibility for our response.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin discusses why Ovadiah was chosen to prophesy about the eventual downfall of Edom. His prophecy says:

> והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה ובית עשו לקש ודלקו בהם ואכלום ולא יהיה שריד לבית עשו
>
> *"The house of Yaakov will be fire, the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Esav straw. They will burn among them and consume them, and no survivor will remain of the house of Esav."*

One answer concerns Ovadiah's own origins. He was an Edomite ger, a convert who had come from Edom itself. The drash further identifies him as a descendant of Eliphaz, the son of Esav. A man who had emerged from that background was chosen to deliver the prophecy about its future.

The Gemara also gives another answer:

> *"HaKadosh Baruch Hu said: Let Ovadiah, who lived among two wicked people and did not learn from their deeds, come and prophesy against the wicked Esav, who lived among two righteous people and did not learn from their deeds."*

The two wicked people were Achav and Izevel. Ovadiah lived among them, yet did not adopt their conduct.

The two righteous people were Yitzchak and Rivkah. Esav lived among them, yet did not learn from their righteousness.

The comparison is powerful. Ovadiah resisted the evil surrounding him. Esav resisted the good surrounding him. Our surroundings exert influence, but a human being still has choices to make about what he will accept and whom he will follow.

Sources: Sanhedrin 39b; Ovadiah 1:18. The fuller account of Ovadiah's descent from Eliphaz appears in the original drash; see also Abarbanel to Ovadiah 1:1, citing Midrash Tanchuma.

Lavan had twenty years of opportunity as well

The drash expresses the other side of that choice with the words **"רשעים ברשות לבם" — the wicked are under the control of their hearts.** Their desires govern what they are willing to learn and whom they are willing to imitate.

Esav had Yitzchak and Rivkah around him and failed to learn from them. Lavan gives us another example.

We have been asking what it meant for Yaakov to spend twenty years with Lavan. But Lavan also spent twenty years with Yaakov.

Who was living in his home? Yaakov Avinu, a holy man of G-d, of whom the Torah says:

> והנה ה׳ נצב עליו
>
> *"Behold, Hashem stood over him."*

The drash describes Yaakov as **"עיקר המרכבה של השכינה" — a principal bearer of the Divine Presence.** The image of a merkavah, a chariot, conveys a life devoted to carrying out Hashem's will and revealing His presence. This was the man whom Lavan had close to him for twenty years.

Yet Lavan learned nothing from his example.

After their final parting, the Torah says:

> וישב לבן למקומו
>
> *"Lavan returned to his place."*

The Pesikta, as quoted in the drash, explains this as **"לרמאותו" — he returned to his deceitfulness.** He went back to his old ways.

The presence of a tzaddik had given Lavan an opportunity. It had not compelled him to change. A person who insists on following his desires can refuse the good that is close at hand, just as a person who strengthens himself in Torah can refuse to follow the evil around him.

Sources: Bereishis 28:13; 32:1; Pesikta as cited in Na'eh Doresh, p. קטו.

Four ways to use this Shabbos

These four teachings give us a practical way to approach Shabbos. We have seen how powerful our surroundings are, how much we need people who strengthen us, how carefully we must preserve our sensitivity to wrongdoing, and how Torah gives us clarity and spiritual strength. Shabbos offers an opportunity to work on every one of these things.

1 Create a positive Shabbos atmosphere

If a negative environment can have such a profound effect on a person, we should recognize the opportunity to surround ourselves with positive influences. The atmosphere we create on Shabbos deserves our deliberate attention.

As we set aside our weekday work and concerns, we have time for davening, learning, and a Shabbos table. We can make that table a place of warmth, respect, and kedushah. What we discuss, how we speak to one another, and what we choose to give our attention to all contribute to the atmosphere.

We can bring a Torah thought into the conversation, give our children and grandchildren something meaningful to remember, and help the people around us feel welcome and valued. Such an atmosphere influences us as well. Shabbos gives us an opportunity to spend a day surrounded by what helps us grow.

2 Spend time with people who strengthen us

Rachel could strengthen Leah, and Leah could strengthen Rachel. Each had someone who understood the values she was trying to preserve. We need that encouragement in our own lives.

This Shabbos, we can make time for a meaningful conversation with someone who encourages our avodas Hashem. We can sit with someone whose outlook helps us grow or learn with someone who takes Torah seriously. These relationships deserve our attention.

We should also consider whom we can strengthen. A conversation in shul, a few encouraging words at the table, or an invitation to learn together may give another person the chizuk he needs. The support can work in both directions, just as it did for Rachel and Leah.

3 Let what we learn renew our sensitivity

Leah knew the facts about Esav. Her repeated inquiries helped preserve her response to those facts. She understood that an atmosphere of wrongdoing could gradually make the wrongdoing feel less disturbing, and she refused to allow that to happen.

Our learning on Shabbos can help us renew that sensitivity. In this week's parsha, for example, we read about Lavan. We can pay attention to his deceitfulness, to the way he treats Yaakov, and to the effects of his conduct. The Torah's account should make an impression on the way we judge such behaviour.

What does dishonesty do to another person? What happens when a person continually justifies his own conduct? Have we become too comfortable with something simply because we encounter it so often?

Perhaps hurtful speech has begun to sound harmless because everyone around us speaks that way. Perhaps something that once disturbed us now seems normal. A thought from the parsha or a shiur can help us recognize that change and consider what Torah asks of us. Our conversation at the Shabbos table can reflect the respect and consideration we are learning to value.

We want to emerge from Shabbos with a renewed ability to feel that wrongdoing is wrong. We can then return to the week more alert to the things we should resist and more careful about the standards we accept.

4 Build ourselves through the Torah we learn

Learning also helps us acquire the strength to remain faithful to what we know is right when pressure comes. Alongside renewed sensitivity, we need the clarity and inner strength that enable us to act on our convictions.

Yaakov prepared himself before entering Lavan's house. His fourteen years of learning gave him a clear understanding of the path of truth and the spiritual strength to follow it. He could live near Lavan without allowing Lavan's conduct to become his standard.

We should give Torah a definite place in our Shabbos. We can attend a shiur, arrange a chavrusa, or choose a sefer and set aside time to learn it properly. The learning deserves enough attention for us to understand an idea and consider how it should affect the way we live. Through that learning, we build ourselves for the week ahead.

When Shabbos ends, we will return to the weekday world with its pressures and opinions. But we can return having spent a day in a positive atmosphere, strengthened relationships that support us, renewed our sensitivity, and acquired greater understanding and strength through Torah.

Yaakov could say, "These twenty years I have been in your house," and still remain Yaakov. The strength he acquired through Torah, together with his clear recognition of what was true, enabled him to withstand the temptations around him.

That is what we can work on this Shabbos: creating a positive atmosphere, strengthening one another, renewing our sensitivity through what we learn, and building ourselves through Torah. In this way, we carry the strength of Shabbos into the week ahead.

Source for Yaakov's protection through Torah and clarity of truth: Na'eh Doresh, p. קטז*. The four applications to Shabbos develop the teachings discussed throughout this drash.*